

Sports

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Raiders, Hawks to decide 1991 WLAA grid title

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

Farmington Hills Harrison might have bigger, stronger, faster football players, but North Farmington won't concede anything more so easily to the undefeated Hawks.

The cross-town rivals will meet for the first time in five years Saturday to decide the Western Lakes Activities Association championship. Kickoff is 1 p.m. at North.

Harrison, 7-0 and rated the top team in Michigan, will be a solid favorite to win its fourth consecutive league title, but the Raiders (6-1 and No. 7 in Class A) plan to challenge the Hawks.

"It's not the size of the dog in the fight," North linebacker Mike Hamill said. "It's the size of the fight in the dog. I think that describes us."

North coach Jim O'Leary compares the situation to that facing the Raiders in 1978 when they upset top-ranked Birmingham Brother Rice in the semifinals of the Class A playoffs.

O'LEARY SAID the Raiders could leave the sprinkler system on all week and let the grass grow to slow the Hawks. He was kidding, of course. Seriously, he said North believes it can win.

"Obviously, we feel they're a super football team," O'Leary said, "but if you play a good game against them you've got a chance."

"We'll have to play a real emotional game, an almost perfect game to beat them. We don't have the speed or size of a lot of teams, but we have a lot of heart."

"It comes down to challenging our kids. It's not embarrassing to have them beat you, but it's a great opportunity for us, too."

North senior Jon Sturtz, who plays upback and monsterback, echoed the statement by Hamill, saying emotion will play a big role in overcoming any physical disadvantages.

"Mentally, we believe our team will be up for the game," he said. "Every single one will be ready to play. That kind of attitude and will to win overcomes a lot of physical ability."

"THEY'RE A good ballclub, and we think we have a good ballclub. We're going to give it our best effort, and the best ballclub will win."

Harrison coach John Herrington said the Hawks are accustomed to opponents reaching an emotional peak when they play Harrison.

"Northville was really fired up and about sold the farm to beat us," he said.

"The only comparable score we have is (Plymouth) Salem and that's about equal. We anticipate a close game. I know North will play with a lot of enthusiasm."

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Amani Plater looks for a way out of the crowd while being guarded by Lisa Derocher (50) and Erin LaCrosse (23).

Falcons fight off city foe

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

Farmington coach Brian Swinehart took a pair of calculated risks in the final seconds of Tuesday's girls basketball game with Farmington Hills Harrison.

Though the first didn't have the desired result, the second did and the Falcons held on to defeat visiting Harrison 43-40.

With his team leading by that score and going to the free throw line, Swinehart "thought about taking a timeout to set up our defense" but decided not to let his shooter.

But the free throw didn't fall, and Harrison had the ball with :07 remaining. Heather Hopkins attempted a three-point shot with two seconds left but missed.

"I thought about fouling so they couldn't get a three off, but better judgment prevailed," Swinehart said.

THAT HARRISON even had a chance to force an overtime was surprising after the third quarter Farmington played.

Leading 24-17 at halftime, the Falcons outscored Harrison 12-6 and led by 13 points entering the final period.

Farmington guard Amani Plater scored six of her eight points in the third quarter, scoring three times at the end of fast breaks. The Falcons forced seven turnovers in that period, generally held Harrison to one shot and ran a successful transition offense.

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Marlins claim league crown

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

Farmington Hills Mercy regained the Catholic League crown in girls cross country Saturday and added the Operation Friendship title Tuesday.

It's the second league championship in five years for the Marlins, who have won four times overall. It marks the first time Mercy has won the league and city titles, however.

"I'm pretty happy about that," Mercy coach Gary Servais said. "I'm enjoying the attitude of the kids. They come every day to work and run. We missed that last year."

Mercy scored 33 points to easily outdistance Dearborn Divine Child (97) in the league event. The next three were Riverview Gabriel Richard (112), Livonia Ladywood (121) and Birmingham Marian (168).

The Marlins had only two returning runners this year, but Servais

girls cross country

managed to produce another championship team in his fifth season as coach.

SENIOR HEATHER Noll paced the team in the league meet at Marshbank Park with a second-place finish (20:18). Ladywood's Malla Dixon was the individual winner.

The Marlins were bunched together with junior Sharmila Prasad taking third (20:28), sophomore Amy Freund fourth (20:29), freshman Eileen O'Connell ninth (21:42) and senior Cara McDonagh 15th (22:29).

In non-scoring roles, Junior Stephanie Johnson was 21st (22:49) and sophomore Mary Thewes 23rd (22:53).

"We had only two kids with experience, so it's a good accomplishment for all of them," Servais said. "Prasad and McDonagh are the only ones who ran last year. For everyone else, it was like their freshman year cross country. They really worked hard and progressed."

The Marlins scored 55 points to win the Operation Friendship meet. Redford was the top Public School League team with 114 points.

Prasad, Noll and Freund earned all-city honors by placing among the top 15 runners. Prasad was second (20:27), Noll sixth (21:20) and Freund 11th (21:47).

O'Connell finished 17th (22:19) and Thewes 19th (22:21) to complete the Mercy scoring. McDonagh was 21st (22:47).

"WE'RE STARTING to come together, but we're going to need big-

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Falcons sidelined in soccer

By Steve Kowalski
staff writer

Dearborn High, the Northwest Suburban League 1993 soccer champion, will know Saturday how much that status means when the Pioneers meet their greatest challenge — Livonia Stevenson.

The Pioneers made an initial statement Wednesday, beating West-ern Lakes Activities Association member Farmington, 2-1, in a Class A district semifinal game hosted by the Falcons. Dearborn will host the district final at 9 a.m. Saturday against Stevenson, co-champions of the WLAA and Observerland's No. 2-ranked team.

Dearborn coach Jeff Newton knows his team will be a huge underdog against Spartans, who have won several Class A titles.

But Wednesday's win over Farmington gave the Pioneers a confidence boost and the Falcons' best player, Mike Giese, made them feel even better afterward when he gave them all a vote of confidence against rival Stevenson.

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JIM JAGGELD/staff photographer

Kris Wiljanen leaves a Redford Union player in his wake Monday. See game story on Page 2B.